

Useful links and places:

-Vancouver's CW community

www.ca.geocities.com/vancouvercatholicworker/

-Catholic Worker international websites:

www.catholicworker.com

www.catholicworker.org

-Radical/Progressive Christianity

www.jesusradicals.org

www.nonviolentjesus.blogspot.com

www.catholicanarchy.org

-Anti-War

www.stopwar.ca

www.ivaw.net

-War Resisters

www.resisters.ca

www.wri-irg.org

-Other Activism

www.foodnotbombs.net

www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/

www.iww.org

-Cool Places:

www.spartacusbooks.org

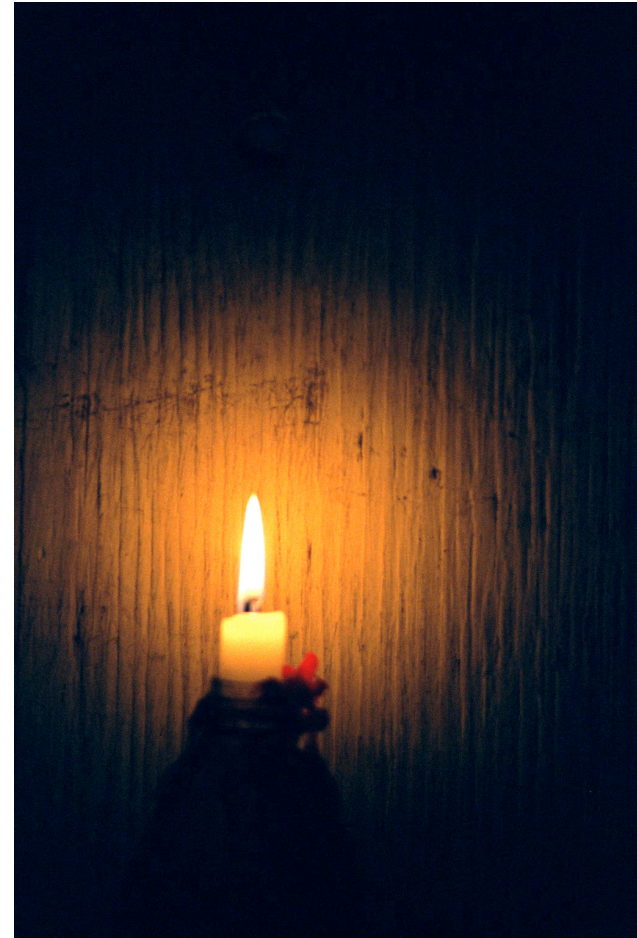
www.kalayaancentre.net

www.ploughshares.ca/

The Christian Radical.

A journal of progressive Christian thought and opinion.

Vol. 1 Issue 5/6 Easter



"God Smiles Every time"

By Joy Ellison

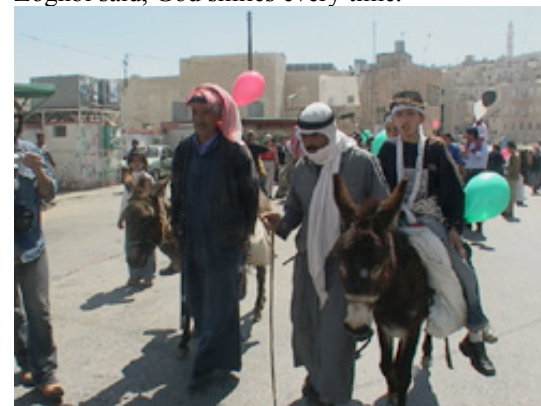
Martin Luther King, Jr. once declared: "One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws." When I visited Bethlehem as a part of a Christian Peacemaker Team delegation, I was privileged to meet with a wonderful man named Zoghbi Zoghbi, a Palestinian Christian who lives out Dr. King's words. Like most Palestinians, Zoghbi doesn't have the permit necessary to go to Jerusalem, or even venture far from the city he lives in. Zoghbi used to attend the Jerusalem Church of the Redeemer, and his wife sat on their board. It's been eight years since Zoghbi has been allowed legally into Jerusalem, which is only 5 miles from where he lives in Bethlehem. Last year, however, Zoghbi successfully snuck into Jerusalem to attend church on Palm Sunday. If he had been discovered in Jerusalem without a permit, he could have been arrested and sent to jail. But Zoghbi told us "God always smiles when I break an unjust law."

While I have been in the West Bank, I have been so humbled by the amazing number of Palestinians who are choosing peace and non-violently resisting the Israeli military occupation. Zoghbi wasn't the only Palestinian who tried to go to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. I met with an organization called the Holy Land Trust, which organized a march to Jerusalem, complete with donkeys and palm branches. They walked towards the checkpoint between Bethlehem

and Jerusalem and peacefully confronted the military. In the front of the crowd, they joined arms and simply pushed through the line of soldiers. Sami Awad, nephew of Palestinian non-violent organizer Mubarak Awad, told me that the soldiers were completely confused and they were able to push through another time. It was a victory for non-violence, for both Palestine and Israel.

Palestinian non-violent resistance is vibrant and strong. Here in the West Bank, I have been attending many demonstrations and other attempts to resist the occupation. Though we in the United States may not be aware of it, Palestine has a long and powerful history of struggling for freedom without violence and the tradition is in no danger of dying out.

Almost everyday that I live in Palestine, I break unjust Israeli laws. I've entered closed military zones. I've photographed soldiers. I've broken curfew orders. And I believe that, like Zoghbi said, God smiles every time. <



Hatred of Capitalism

By Michael Friesen

I met a Swedish capitalist (!) the other day. He gave me a series of reasons he hated socialism, although, to be fair, most of his criticisms were directed at the welfare state rather than worker ownership-management, which is what socialism is actually about. The following are the reasons why I will never, ever affirm capitalism as a humane system.

Unsustainability

In capitalist economies success means economic growth. Unfortunately, in order to function properly and sustain a certain standard of living, capitalism forever needs to open new markets, produce new goods, and create new generations of consumers. One of the first laws of economics is that there exists a scarcity of resources. In fact, it is precisely this law, which is invoked by capitalists to defend private property. In reality, we are seeing the devastation of fragile ecosystems, the exploitation of oil-rich nations, genetic modification of food, and the reintroduction of nuclear energy all so as to sustain capitalism's unsustainable quest to raise the GDP – gross domestic product – to ever new heights, much to the detriment of mother earth and the sentient life which comes from her. Soon our resources will be severely depleted and war will be the only foreign policy available for

settling disputes over land, oil, and, yes, even drinking water.

Conflict

Capitalism, in upholding private property, divides society into various classes, each with mutually opposed interests. These mutually opposed interests give rise to conflicts between families, classes, even nations. Whereas the Roman Catholic Church teaches 'the common destination of all goods' is attainable under a market economy, such a thing is impossible in a capitalist market economy as each group prospers or declines in reverse proportion to the other. Thus a booming business economy demands a surplus of cheap labour, lax environmental laws, and limited social security while a capable welfare state demands high taxation, strong union support, and intensive labour legislation. Attempts to find 'middle ground' always entail finding a tolerable degree of exploitation, one which will increase or decrease according to which group assumes power next.

Fascism

Unregulated capitalism is notably inefficient. What is called 'laissez-faire' is really a government-regulated economy geared towards corporate interests. This model is close to what is called corporatism, the economic counterpart to political fascism. In fact, the most successful industries in the United States – the

heart of global capitalism – are those directly or indirectly overseen by the government: arms production, the pharmaceutical industry, the prison system, etc. Politicians are not unaware of this phenomenon. President Eisenhower – no flaming leftist – called it the ‘military-industrial complex’, which suggests the U.S. economy must stay in a state of perpetual war if it is to function properly. There is, therefore, an additional incentive to wage war besides opening new markets abroad. And, of course, this ‘military-industrial complex’ is vital enough to the economy’s health that half of the total budget goes to subsidizing the military.

Imperialism

In capitalism, it is the major economic players – banks, universities, unions – which determine policy, not the people. And since the most powerful of these institutions – multinational corporations – possess no citizenship, they are forever seeking profits away from their home base. Occasionally, corporations push government to intervene directly for their benefit, such as was/is the case with Cuba. More often, they use other international organizations – the World Bank, the IMF, etc. – to coerce less developed nations to hand over their sovereignty to international business. This is done not least through ‘free trade’ agreements, but also through embargos, debt relief, and other measures, which keep foreign nations locked in grinding poverty. All this is usually presented as a

form of Western-backed aid and development such that both terms are viewed cynically in the so-called Third World.

Consumerism

Society, having been turned against itself in a merciless competition for survival, assumes a hyper-individualistic character under the capitalist model. As a result, various forms of community – church, family, union culture – collapse or adopt an individualistic ethos to survive. Thus unions, formerly the organ of working class struggle, become cozy with management and even the broader business community in hopes of gaining advantages over other unions or simply to increase leaders’ salaries. With authentic community gutted, consumerism is the alternative presented to the masses through which they are to search for meaning and find identity. Thus a revolutionary genre like hip-hop degenerates into gangster rap and churches active in the civil rights movement give way to the mega-churches of the Southern states. In all this, men and women become increasingly shallow and amoral as even religion is reduced to a commodity available in a wider consumer culture.

Exploitation

If imperialism, consumerism, and ecological collapse were not enough, capitalism seeks to further expand

the scope of its exploitation to the workplace. Instead of producing enough for oneself and one's family, the worker finds him or herself signing away his or her freedom to an employer whose bottom line is maximizing profits. In the average day, he or she will produce unnecessary consumer products in miserable conditions for people he or she will never meet, probably people who live in different countries. In recompense, the worker receives not the fruit of his or her toil, but a wage, enough to support his or her family (if he or she is fortunate) and consume products made by other workers in anonymous factories in unknown conditions. The worker receiving only a fraction of the money generated by his labour, the rest travels upwards, reinforcing a hierarchal system of employee and employer, known in former times as master and serf, free and slave, aristocrat and servant.

Assaults on Human Dignity

With no meaningful control over his or her destiny, the consumer finds satisfaction in choosing between competing name brands as everything from sex to god is offered in colourful packaging for discount prices. In this way, the consumer becomes him/herself becomes objectified – a profit to be won over by competing companies. Since work continues to become increasingly specialized in capitalist economies, the nature of the work becomes less fulfilling and drearier. The only freedom the wage-

earner possesses is choosing which pimp (employer) he or she will rent him or herself out to. Capitalism is thus, at its core, an economy of prostitutes and pimps. The Sabbath day becomes devoted to worshipping at the temple of mammon – the mall – while nature is reduced to pockets of green – parks – located in gloomy urban areas and this amid financial insecurity, cut-throat behaviour, and the growth of new and more ruthless empires which challenge God's reign.

The Way Forward

Capitalism is a system full of contradictions and is liable to implode at any moment as it did on Black Thursday in 1929. That being said, the way out is not to exploit these contradictions – tempting as it might be – but to develop alternatives within the framework we find ourselves. The church – ekklesia in Greek – means called out – called out of darkness into light. We are called to be an example, Paul would say a spectacle, by shunning capitalist values – success, independence, security – and embracing those of the Gospel – peace, renunciation, self-giving – by practicing, not intended as a complete list: voluntary poverty and/or voluntary communism, forgiveness of debts, environmental awareness, lending without expectation of return, taking the lesser position, releasing slaves, and turning from idols. When we begin to do these things, we will see just how far

biblical economics are from those of global capitalism.<



Confessions of Crimes Against the State

By John Dear S.J.

With the Bush Administration's admission of widespread surveillance upon ordinary Americans in pursuit of empire, I thought I would save them the trouble of further harassing me and confess my crimes.

I am, after all, an ex-con. I've have been arrested scores of times, imprisoned in jails across the country, even had a national guard unit march upon my house and church--all because of my public stand against the state's wars and nuclear weapons. I'm sure I'm on somebody's list.

Forty years ago, the great Trappist monk Thomas Merton wrote "A Signed Confession of Crimes Against the State," where he made the shocking announcement that he had been sitting in the woods, enjoying the sunshine and listening to a mockingbird. He confessed that he was useless as far as the state was concerned. "I am shattered by the realization that I have never attributed the sunshine to its true cause, namely the state," Merton wrote. "Clearly I am not worthy to exist another minute." Alas, my crimes are equally deviant.

First of all, yes, I live in the desert, off the grid, far from the mainstream culture, and like Merton, that makes me useless, unsuccessful, unAmerican, an

unproductive cog in the all-American wheel. Worse, I live not far from Los Alamos, where the state builds its nuclear bombs, spending billions for global destruction while poisoning the land and the population. Yes, I confess it, I hope and pray that this work, which I name as demonic, will end immediately. Yes, I admit, last August, for the sixtieth anniversary of Hiroshima, I joined hundreds of friends, and put on sackcloth and ashes, like the people of Nineveh long ago, to repent of the sin--the crime!--of war and nuclear weapons.

Yes, it's true, I sometimes wander the desert like John the Baptist denouncing the crimes of the state, and call for its leaders to fall from their thrones as Jesus' mother Mary did famously in the Magnificat. Yes, I confess, too, that I have been telling audiences around the world about my criminal hope for the disarmament of Los Alamos, and for that matter, Livermore Labs, the SAC Base, the Trident Sub bases, the Oak Ridge Labs, and all other imperial installations of nuclear genocide.

Yes, the state should know I have not been rehabilitated. I'm proud of hammering on an F15 nuclear-capable fighter bomber in 1993 in Goldsboro, North Carolina to fulfill the prophet Isaiah's commandment to "beat swords into plowshares." We upheld international law, the Nuremberg Principles, and God's law of nonviolence. I believe that anyone

involved with the production, maintenance and use of nuclear weapons is engaged in criminal behavior.

Worse, I confess that I have traveled into enemy territory. I admit I have not killed my enemies; I have not hated my enemies; I do not wish my enemies were dead, like most patriotic Americans do, as the state orders. I not only like them, I love them, as Jesus commanded, and I have met tens of thousands of them over the years--in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Haiti, Palestine, India, the Philippines, yes, even in Iraq. Tomorrow, I am doing it again. I go to Colombia to befriend the people targeted by U.S. military and economic domination. I know I shouldn't, but I am called by a Higher Power to love them. I just can't help myself. I'm so sorry.

Yes, I confess it: I'm also against the death penalty, not only because it's unjust and racist, but immoral, cruel, inhuman. I not only want a moratorium, I want it outlawed. I hope that every electric chair will soon be dismantled and we will stop injecting people with lethal poisons--as if killing people who kill people is the way to show that killing people is wrong. I am also against the state's preferential option for the rich, for corporations and billionaires. I want free healthcare for everyone, massive new funding for schools and teachers, food and clothing and decent jobs and affordable housing for everyone, and a clean, healthy environment for all. All of this is possible if we disarm, but you can't have a culture of justice and

peace and a culture of injustice and war at the same time. It's one or the other. My criminal mind thinks that all the money spent on war and weapons and killing should be spent instead on human needs.

Yes, I confess it: I am against the U.S. war on Iraq, and always have been. The state has lied and continues to lie. It couldn't care less about anyone anywhere; about democracy at home or abroad; about rebuilding Fallujah or New Orleans; about disarmament in Iraq or New Mexico. It wants control over the world's oil, especially in the Middle East, for economic hegemony, and it will gain that control at any cost, including the death of tens of thousands of beautiful children. I don't care how patriotic or unpatriotic it sounds: I do not support the killing of children, even if every other God-fearing American insists we be number one, even with the "collateral damage" of the dead bodies of children. To my way of thinking, the death of one child is a crime and must be avoided at all costs, including the loss of oil. I know this goes against U.S foreign policy, but this is the bottom line.

Now we get to the worst crime of all, my criminal vision. I confess it: I envision a world where the United States is not killing anyone, threatening anyone, or preparing to destroy the planet. I want to live in a world without war, poverty and nuclear weapons. Yes, I know, such a world means the demise of the state. No more empire, no more Pentagon, no

more nuclear weapons, no more unlimited money for Exxon and Cheney's friends, no more military bases around the world, no more torture, no more F15s and F16s, no more Trident subs, no more bombs and guns and bullets. Yes, in my vision, the Vice President will no longer be able to shoot his friends.

In my criminal vision, everyone will become nonviolent. We will be a nation of Martin Luther Kings, Coretta Scott Kings, Dorothy Days and Thomas Mertons. We will love everyone, welcome everyone, care for everyone, and serve everyone, even spend our resources to eliminate hunger, end disease, and promote peace with justice around the entire planet. Yes, I admire those unAmerican, unpatriotic abolitionists who worked for the end of slavery. I consider myself a new abolitionist, working for the end of war, poverty and nuclear weapons.

(I even think that every minister, preacher, priest, bishop, and cardinal who supports war and preaches heretical sermons like "God Is Pro-War," should just quietly resign, join a Trappist monastery or move to the desert, and dwell in the peace of God for the rest of their lives to relearn the holy wisdom of Gospel nonviolence.)

So there you have it. I confess it. I will live in peace with everyone. I refuse to be part of your global violence. I will remain a person of nonviolence for the rest of my life.

According to you, the state, that is the greatest crime of all. I will not go along with the state's intent to kill anyone, even if I'm one of the few people left in the country who refuse to kill. The state can lock me up, bug me, wiretap me, harass me, follow me, arrest me, and jail me, as you have done many times before. The state can even kill me, as it killed Martin Luther King, Jr. I will not give in to its violence, support its wars or weapons, pay taxes for its killing sprees, pledge allegiance to its imperialism, listen to its media sycophants, wave its idolatrous flag or sit quietly while it massacres my beloved sisters and brothers around the world.

I will stand with the global human family. I insist we are all equal, all children of the God of peace, all deserving of a life of peace. I pledge allegiance to God's reign of perfect peace, nonviolent love and equal justice for everyone, including the children of Iraq.

Alas, poor state, your days are numbered. You better confess it, shut down your surveillance program and get on with the work of disarmament. A new day of peace is coming. <



Ash Wednesday Prayers, 6:00 Mass

Teach us to care and not to care

Teach us to sit still

--T.S. Eliot

Will brittle vines
refuse to turn
green will
wine stay wine?
Forgive me--

I am tongue-tied robin
in frozen sky—but
God, what you insist
I believe:
a way out--
grace coiled in seeds.

Everything wants
to split open
in spring, to push,
penetrate
wet flower beds
yield slow tulips
winter-clumsy
crave fixed light.

We don't know how
to die, we forget
how to curl, wait,
each familiar frost bites,
each lightening

rings our hearts.
I don't know how
it brings up green.

And you redeem us,
bring us back,
every seed,
everything,
circles. I see it
and don't believe.
Earth spit us out
swallows us whole,
we inherit, we let go,
it takes years

to lose our husk
to become dust.

I want heaven to fall now

God, what I had,
that I had to
have, take it.

Send one more sky,
help me pray
open-handed

while Easter unfolds,
help us hope to
hope to turn, if

February forgets
lush greens, fragile

daylight April brings

(and we are the ones who
make false winters,
eyes adjusting to dark,
who hoard, starve,
when you left enough,
when you promise
spring

and deliver)

meanwhile we offer
the sign of peace
smile, touch hands

I don't know how
light found
last autumn's buried bulb,
how, even at lent,
spiked leaves show

I don't know how
you bring peace
not the world's peace
you bring--

and your stars still
burn moonless nights

Oh God, say the word only

By Melissa Sillitoe (March 2005)

My last two days in Portland

By Chris Rooney

The last two days of my recent trip to Portland were the busiest of the whole week. On the 19th was the day of the big peace march and rally, Portland's contribution to the international day of action. We Catholic Worker folks got to the rally early because Joy and her family had material at both the American Friends Service Committee's table and at the Vancouver for Peace table. I brought down the small pile of The Radical, which I had carried with me to Oregon and placed them out on the Vancouver for Peace table. We had a lot to do at the rally, for instance there were two large stacks of flyers to give out, so that people would know about the action the Whitefeather people had been planning we also had petitions to get signed in support of that same action.

A group of concerned Oregonians including the Catholic Workers at Whitefeather house have been trying to lobby Senator Wyden to introduce legislation to bring a quicker end to the Iraq war and a more complete withdrawal of American military presence in the region. The Petition, as well as delineating a very well thought out plan for this hoped for legislation also included a commitment to resort to non-violent civil disobedience if their request was not met.

The peace march was impressive; there were thousands of people who came out to march and to

show their desire for peace and for an end to the war. We collected a great many signatures on our petition and all of the flyers were given out much faster than I had anticipated. There was also the largest black bloc I had ever seen at a protest march. Probably about 100 or so young Anarchists from as far away as Seattle showed up to shout and act menacing. A friend I had made that week invited me to march with him in the bloc but I declined. My personal belief is that Anarchy as a viable alternative to hierarchy and state authority is best served by less alienating tactics and that when the revolution comes it just might be in spite of the actions taken by the black bloc, rather than because of them. But reserving my sermonizing for this paper I simply and politely declined his offer and tried to get some space between my more angry comrades and myself.

After the rally I was wiped but because a more important guest took up the bedroom I had been occupying, I had to spend that night on the living room floor with my sleeping bag.

I wasn't lucky enough to get to sleep when I wanted to because that night the house was being used for the last non-violence training before the next day's action at the Senators office. But once everyone had gone home and the house settled down for the night I had a very good conversation about politics and the rally and such with one of the other people doing the action

and then fell asleep with a t-shirt over my eyes to block out the light.

The living room at Whitefeather doesn't make a good bedroom because of all the windows and the white walls and carpet that seem to amplify the sunlight. I fought consciousness for as long as I could but at 10:30am I gave in and, throwing off my sleeping bag I ambled over to the washroom for my morning ablutions.

The rally in support of those risking arrest was supposed to start at noon and I was worried, as I sat on the downtown train that I would be late and would not be able to help as a peace marshal but I ended up being there right on time. The rally went much better than expected, though the crowd was small they were peaceful and dedicated and instead of hecklers all the people who acknowledged us from cars or sidewalk were supportive and positive. There was a press conference held where a number of clergy and prominent community members talked about the need to end the war and to begin a credible and independent peace and reconstruction effort in Iraq.

The group of 19 people inside of the Federal Building were predictably met with something less than enthusiasm and something much less than consent to their proposal and petition. And so the Wyden 19 sat down on the floor of the Senator's office and refused to move. Homeland Security refused to arrest them

and after four or five hours gave them each a citation for refusing to follow the order of a federal officer and discharged them through the front doors.

Despite this though I think that the action taken in Senator Wyden's office was a success. Time will tell how much attention they get from the press, and they certainly weren't as dramatic as the recent acts taken by Catholic Workers and Jonah House activists in DC last month but as Tom Hastings, one of the Wyden 19, said at dinner that night "I look at this as a campaign" there will be more.

This small, peaceful act of civil disobedience could just be part of the birthing of a new generation of American dissenters, a generation of people from all walks of life who by the strength of their convictions have the ability to bring civil disobedience back from the margins of activism where it has languished sadly for so many years collecting cobwebs and dust, and back into the language and strategies of good people everywhere. <



For Everything Else...

Sunday, October 9, 2005

Proper 23, Year A

Sarah-Andrea Morrigan

St. Brigid Celtic Anabaptist Community of Central
Portland

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, “Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” Aaron said to them, “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. — Exodus 32:1-3 (NRSV)

Instant gratification. Such an innovative concept. The modern society has been built around it — fast food joints that can serve what you want to eat when you want it; clothing shops at malls and inside big-box retailers where you can just walk in and pick up what you want to wear; you pick up a phone and you get to talk to just about anyone in any part of the world with only 10 to 15 pushes of buttons.

There was a time when getting a dinner meant making a reservation, dressed up for an occasion, going to the restaurant, then sit at a table for 20 to 40 minutes to

see even the first of a course meal. Need new clothes? You go to a tailor or a seamstress, and you’ll probably have a new outfit in a few weeks. If you need to communicate with your friend on the other part of the planet, it might take up to a month before your letter travels across the ocean on a steamship, and a few more days from the port to the letter’s destination.

Ten years ago we had a 33k modem that used up a regular phone line. We used to think how fast 33k was! Then about a year later we begin hearing about some ISPs beginning to support the brand-new 56k Flex modems! It was a phenomenon. In fact, 56k was so fast for a phone line to handle that the Federal Communications Commission made ISPs to limit the transmission speed at 44k. A decade ago, downloading software meant getting an half-a-megabyte file in an hour. Today 500k is just a few seconds on a DSL.

Instant gratification. That’s usually what money can buy. Consumer economy is driven by our insatiable desire for instant gratification.

A certain fast food chain in Japan made an enormous fortune for decades with a slogan: “cheap, quick and yummy.” They’ve been so successful that they expanded to California during the 1980s and now they’re making even more fortune in China, despite the potentially devastating set back a couple of years ago when the Mad Cow Disease made them impossible to buy cheap beef from the U.S.; they just

switched to Chinese pork and Mexican beef, and went on with the business as usual. Isn't it such an effective marketing technique? And this slogan never gets too old. It sells to our subconscious desire for pleasure and satisfaction "cheap" and "quick" — without efforts, without a lot of sacrifice.

Japan had been traditionally a cash economy. There were payday advance loans, mostly predatory ones, but in general buying things on credit had been frowned upon as being "shameful." Things are quite different here in the Western Civilization. About five years ago MasterCard began a series of TV advert campaign that went something like this:

"Two admission tickets to the zoo, \$14."
"Ice cream cones, \$4."

At the end, a phrase identifying some priceless intangible that cannot be purchased (such as "time together with your daughter") is followed by the word and voice over: 'priceless.' Immediately following 'priceless' are the voice-overs: "There are some things money can't buy, for everything else there's MasterCard."

The not-so-unspoken premise behind this advert is that buying things (even by borrowing money with a relatively high interest from your bank) immediately brings what we as humans seek out with a deep yearning. The priceless, thus claims the mighty Oracle

of MasterCard, can be purchased indirectly through one's participation in a consumerist society. The priceless: love, happiness, peace, comfort, freedom. They are all available for your purchase. Just give us your credit card number and sign right there on that little piece of paper.

Many thousands of years ago, the newly freed slaves from then the most powerful empire on the planet Earth faced a challenge: they have realized that a "priceless" demands too much price from them. They jumped on to Moses' bandwagon looking for freedom and self-determination. They were even promised a potential prosperity in a fertile land of Canaan at the junction of three worlds: Europe, Asia and Africa. And they fled the land that was oppressive yet nevertheless affluent. But after a long journey day and night, their leader Moses tells them that he would go up high in that mountain to meet and talk with God. And they waited for a night, and a day, then nights and days. They begin frustrated and afraid. Where is Moses? Where is God? Where is freedom? We're in the middle of a deserted wilderness, nobody's land. Are we going to be left here to starve, sunburnt and die? Then they nostalgically look back at those "good old" days of slavery where they got three hots and a cot. They talk about garlic and grilled meat. Maybe, just maybe, freedom isn't worth much? Maybe, just maybe, Egypt wasn't that a bad place—until that crazy Moses guy started raising hell and getting all of us into troubles?

Then the mob demands an answer from Aaron, the brother of Moses and his Number 2 leadership figure. Where is God? Is Moses lying, isn't he? He's playing a scam on us! There's no God! And we're stuck in here! Give us a God! C'mon...we're starving and there's nothing out here. Not even an Egyptian Fried Chicken! We want God and we want it NOW. We want the cheap, easy and yummy, quick!

And Aaron, probably not knowing what to say for a moment, says to the mob: "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."

Of course Aaron knows well enough that all the gold isn't going to buy what they are struggling for. All what Aaron could offer would be an ersatz, temporary substitute to make these angry mobsters feel good and shut up for a while. It is kind of revealing that these people fell for this "sales pitch" for an instant gratification knowing what Aaron said. Read this again carefully: "Take off the gold rings that are... of your wives, your sons, and your daughters." Not yours, though! These people fell for this and took the gold from their wives and kids. Those men still got to keep their own gold! And the mob paid Aaron a fortune so they could buy a "priceless": God!

Some people might argue with me saying that being in the desert barely surviving, they must have thought

gold means nothing to them. Well—they were carrying the gold as a resettlement fund once they got to their dream destination of freedom land. And they knew well enough there would be traders traveling from all four directions through Canaan to and fro.

And from what we read, they had Aaron build a sculpture of a bull and an altar, then they threw a party like there was no tomorrow. Their focus on the "priceless" has been entirely lost by then, as they sought instant gratifications. And the big chunk of gold was christened a god that "would go before us." Now they were planning on trekking the rest of their proposed itinerary behind one silly golden calf, a prima facie evidence of their determination that they would pay someone a fortune out of their children's pockets (rather than their own, of course!) to be satisfied with something far less than their priceless dreams and visions.

Today, things haven't changed much. In fact, more so than any time period in the known history, we have a luxury of indulging ourselves with just about anything instantly. Even the poorest of the poor in North America is living a life that was once a distant dream of the kings and queens of the mediaeval era. As I am writing this sermon, I know that one can download a copy of today's sermon on the very same day from far-away places. It can be read from Cape Town, from Singapore, from Perth, from Iqaluit, from Reykjavik, from Christchurch, or even from an

observatory in Antarctica through the satellite Internet. Likewise, I can not only read but actually participate in the whole worship service in places that are very far away, real-time, from my office. I can attend a worship service in Fort Worth, Texas, or even Yamato, Japan, through the Internet. The Yamato Calvary Chapel even lets you fill out a pew card online while watching the service on your computer screen as it occurs (and yes, the sermon can be dubbed with a voice of an English language interpreter for the 11 a.m. service)!

We are literally overloaded with instant gratification. But it is also true that our lives haven't necessarily become happier or more meaningful. With all this, we experience more oppression, more injustice, more inequality, more repressive governments, more conflicts, more violence, and more diseases. While our communication technologies are almost straight from the science fiction of 20 years ago, our communication skills deteriorate. Even with all the new gadgets we don't seem to relate well to each other, and conflicts are everywhere. The overabundance of just about everything made us forget what really matters in life — and as we keep ourselves entertained and occupied with every new thing that appears to the “market” we lost our connection to the divine, to each other and to our innermost selves. Soon we became valueless, cynical and hedonistic. Our cultures became commoditized and then became irrelevant. Now culture is nothing

more than another product for consumption, exploitation and capitalization.

What was once considered disgusting is now exalted and promoted as hip. Arts and music disintegrated from what was once a highly creative, spiritual and intellectual discipline to something destructive, banal and unintelligible. Certain timeless virtues are now out; cheating and stealing are considered smart and wise. War is glorified and life is disrespected as the military-industrial special interest push for more wars for greed. Education became mere training programs for future corporate employees and for battery of realized testing. Love is now a four-letter euphemism for banalized sexuality, while divorce and infidelity run so rampant they are now “normal” part of the society. We no longer connect to each other as humans, as persons. We have let our governments, bureaucratic non-profit social services, and our mass media conglomerates to do all the connecting, so we have government agencies and marketing firms that know everything about us while we don't even bother saying hi to our neighbours. We are now reduced to numbers and data fields on numerous computer systems. In quite a perverted way we are always connected and never alone thanks to the omniscient and omnipresent technology; yet we have been uprooted and detached. Or as traditionalist philosophers would say, deracinated and atomized.

Miss Alice Lucy Trent, the British author who wrote *The Feminine Universe*, makes a reference to the ancient Hindu cosmology in comparing the modern and post-modern world. The modern world, the kind that was marked by unprecedented expansion and growth, ran from the Renaissance to the Victorian era, then to the half of the last century. This time period was motivated by an upward tendency in cultural development. The post-modern world, specifically after the year 1965 according to Miss Trent, differs significantly from the modern world because of its “downward” tendency in which everything in our collective mind began to collapse and disintegrate. While we witness a lot of scientific and technological advancements, they are primarily improvements from what were already discovered or invented, not anything revolutionarily new. The post-modern era has no Edison or Einstein. The post-modern era also lacks in meaningful social actions; most of the “social betterment” programs have been merely tools of politicians to enrich themselves and their supporters, while creating bureaucratic behemoths and further driving people into a more dehumanizing and controlled world where the only realistic freedom that is left is freedom to choose between a limited number of consumer options. Post WWII increase in nuclear households and single parents, as well as the emergence of automobile-dependent suburbs, exacerbated the situation rapidly.

Then we have the media whose real business is to sell advertisements. In order to keep the viewer ratings and readership up, they do what they know the best: sell fears. Just show the real-time footage of Iraq war, 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre, crime sprees du jour, new “research” that says what we eat or what we do regularly can make us very sick, and so forth; then show these graphic imagery of doom and gloom interspersed with TV commercials for medicines and political candidates.

It’s difficult in this cultural atmosphere to look beyond instant gratification. We get a feeling as if doomsday is just around the corner, as if we get another super-disease and super-germ when we go out tomorrow for grocery store, as if some lunatics who look different from us are out there hell-bent on killing all of us through their terror attacks.

We try to seek 15 minutes of bliss through consumerism that offers instant gratification. And this desire of ours is what makes these corporations and their shareholders richer every day.

How can we wake up from this insanity? How can we start looking beyond the 15 minutes of bliss? How can we heal the world that has become so barren and lifeless, hostile and cynical?

Miss Trent points out that in the past, the culture — arts, music, theatre, literature, religion, and just about anything — was seen as a pointer to the spiritual and metaphysical truth. Hence the idea of beauty,

goodness and truth were meant to be a reflection and embodiment of the essential value and principles that is universally held and that “cannot not be true.” Like the ancient Nordic symbolism of Yggdrasil, or the “World Tree,” everything is rooted to the source of all beings, where God’s love, justice and truth originate. Just as a leaf you find on a branch of a tree is connected and is nourished by the root, and so is another leaf ten feet away on the other side of the same tree, all people had a sense of “rootedness” to what is higher and greater than the sum of all what they are. With that common root, then, everyone was also connected to each other and all aspects of our individual lives were parts of an integral whole.

The first and foremost thing we need to do, then, is to reconnect. Once our roots are back down to the source, we will again be alive and thriving. We will be connected and whole. And as we read in the Scriptures, this starts not at some impersonal, multinational bureaucratic machinery far away in New York, Washington, D.C., or Brussels. It starts within each of us, between our ears and within our hearts. Romans 12:2 (NRSV): “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what the will of God— what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Writing to the frustrated Christians of Philippi, Paul gives them a practical advice in face of frustration, cynicism and stress. Among others, he writes: “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is

honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4:8, NRSV.)

Something that makes our spirits and hearts soar is something that keeps us rooted. Think about these things, these priceless things. For everything else? Everything else follows and falls into its own place if we let it guided by the perfect love and peace of God.<



Of Babies and Angels

By J. Barrett Lee

Annunciation

The Feast of the Annunciation is celebrated on March 25, nine months to the day before Christmas. This well known story is told in Luke 1:26-38, where an angel informs Mary that she is miraculously pregnant with the Son of God.

Most people read this story and focus in on the miraculous wonder of it all. The Virgin Mary is often portrayed as an innocent girl, caught up in wonderful events, all to the glory of God. There is a certain naiveté about her that informs most people's perception of the situation. Roman Catholic theology holds that Mary remained a virgin for the rest of her life, no doubt to the dismay of her self-sacrificing husband. She is held up as the standard of innocence, purity, and faith for all women.

However, there is much that goes unsaid in such an interpretation of this passage. First and foremost, Mary was suddenly faced with the reality that she was pregnant, an unwed mother in first century Palestine. Even if the ritual stoning for adultery was foregone, she would be stigmatized for life for this obvious indiscretion. Her fiancé would surely leave her over this. In fact, Matthew's gospel states that Joseph actually planned on leaving her until

an angel appeared to him and informed him of the nature of the situation. In a great twist of irony, Mary's cousin Elizabeth had just finished exclaiming in Luke 1:25, the verse immediately preceding the Annunciation, that God had taken away her reproach. How ironic that in the very next scene, Mary would have that reproach heaped upon her.

During this turbulent time, Mary no doubt would have experienced the disdain of many around her, possibly even family. What is worse is that her explanation of the angel's message would only serve to add blasphemy to the charges levied against her. All the "decent" folk would certainly turn their noses up at such a situation.

Mary's only consolations came from her trust in the message delivered to her by the angel and in her knowledge that she truly was innocent before God. This must have been a very lonely time indeed. While Joseph's position is explained more fully in Matthew, he is barely mentioned in Luke. What the reader does see is that Joseph remains faithful to Mary in spite of this horrendous scandal, which would have certainly implicated him as well. It seems that God was certainly not championing "family values" at this crucial point in Christian history. His annunciation had certainly put her in a very compromising position. Nevertheless, she clung desperately to her trust in the message the angel had given her.

Visitation

If there was one person who could understand Mary's predicament after the Annunciation, it would be her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth had herself

recently had remarkable experiences regarding angels and babies. An elderly woman, she had been unable to conceive all her life. Her shame was the stigma of barrenness in an age when children were regarded as a symbol of status, even blessing from God.

An angel had visited her husband, a priest, while he was performing his religious duties. The angel informed him about his wife's forthcoming conception, which would bring forth a prophet. Elizabeth's time of shame was at an end, while her younger cousin's was just beginning.

Perhaps Elizabeth herself was meant to be a gift for Mary. Mary traveled dozens of miles from Galilee to small town in the hills of Judah, possibly seeking refuge from the scorn of neighbors. For a young, pregnant girl to make such a journey unaccompanied was quite a feat. One can imagine that Mary would have been at the end of her proverbial rope, physically and emotionally, by the time she ascended that last hill up to Elizabeth's house. Could it be that this was the last place on earth she could hope to find comfort and understanding?

When Elizabeth heard Mary shout hello across the field, the fetus prophet jumped for joy inside of her. She opened her mouth and God spoke a message of comfort through her to a weary pregnant teenager hiking up the hill. Perhaps these were the first words of affirmation and comfort Mary had heard since the day the angel came to see her, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ...And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." (Lk 1:42, 45 ESV)

After this initial meeting, Mary stayed on for another three months. One could imagine the two of them sharing the joys, fears, hopes, and pains of pregnancy with each other. Since Elizabeth was already six months pregnant when the Annunciation occurred, it is quite possible that Mary was present, assisting with the birth of John the Baptist. What a learning experience this must have been for her, to be so closely involved in a pregnancy and birth just before her own time of labor. What bonds of friendship were formed between these two distant relatives, separated by age and distance, but united by these bizarre yet extraordinary events!

Magnificat

Elizabeth's encouragement helped restore Mary's faith and guide her through this incredible crisis of faith. Why must God's plan involve such

social scorn? Why must God act in such a way as to offend such good, “decent” people? What is Mary to make of all this?

Mary’s poem is a fine piece of subversive literature which has been tamed and read by the church for two thousand years. In it, the reader can see the beginnings of a scandalous gospel. God reaches out to a weary pregnant teenager and turns the world upside down.

Mary begins her poem by praising God for helping her out in her moment of desperation. From there, she jumps quickly into echoing Elizabeth’s sentiments of affirmation. Mary has clearly been empowered through her encounter with Elizabeth. She exclaims, “From now on, all generations will call me blessed!” (v.48) These are bold words coming from a bold young woman who has just been through hell and high water. She has been reassured in her faith and now proclaims that faith proudly. She, like Elizabeth, can now say that God has taken away her reproach.

At the end of the poem, Mary’s vision of who God is has been transformed dramatically. This is the God who turns things upside down. “He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he has sent empty away.” (v.53) The status quo of respectable Jewish culture has been shattered by the God who stands over it. He has chosen an unwed, pregnant teenager as his vessel for delivering salvation to the world.

For Mary, motherhood has become a gateway for liberation and salvation. But the story does not end with this empowering encounter. That which she has experienced at this point is only a shadow of the coming liberation and salvation. Jesus would take this motif and multiply it *ad infinitum*. He would enrage the Jewish respectables to such a degree that they would conspire to have him killed. He would welcome the whores, the drunks, the tax collectors, the lepers. He would go on a rampage through the holiest site in all of Judaism. The Roman officials would be so frightened by the raucous he causes that they will agree to his unjust execution. Finally, he would overturn death itself in the ultimate act of subversion: Resurrection.

If the veneer of innocence is stripped away from the stories of Advent and Christmas, they can be seen for the scandalous, gritty tales that they are. God is establishing his upside-down Kingdom among the least likely characters and in the least likely way. As Mary said, “He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.” In other words, God is coming to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.

Mary found a makeshift community in her cousin, Elizabeth. Their connection also came from the mutual experience of pregnancy. Through this relationship, both of them (but especially Mary) were inspired and empowered to a form of parallel decency, namely *metadecency*. In other words, they existed “beyond” the social standards of decency. They had

both come into their respective situations based on an experience with and a call from God. His will has trumped social standards, but left them nonetheless scandalized and isolated, much like single mothers in modern times. At the end of the day, his will (the establishment of God's Kingdom) prevails to the betterment of all involved. The Kingdom is *meta*, it is above and beyond the socially decent.

Christian tradition has made Mary very accessible through its liturgy. Her official day in the calendar of saints is August 15, but there are several other celebrations pertaining to her.

The feast of the Annunciation is celebrated nine months before Christmas day, on March 25. While Advent is only celebrated in the four weeks leading up to Christmas, there is a sense in which the church is celebrating Mary's pregnancy from March on. There are other events, such as Lent, Easter, and Pentecost going on, but this does serve as an unspoken reality whose quiet presence in the liturgy haunts us all year long, until it begins to make itself known in Advent. This feast could serve as a celebration of motherhood and God's unusual choice of people for the execution of his will in a *metadecent* context.

The feast of the Visitation takes place on May 31. Here we have two empowered women sharing together their experiences in being primary vessels for the establishment of God's kingdom. In a more chauvinistic society, this kind of meeting is very serious and even dangerous to patriarchal hegemony. On this day, why not celebrate feminine community?

It could also serve as a reminder that while God's call can isolate, it also empowers, and eventually brings his followers into new community.

The Magnificat is traditionally sung at evening prayer throughout the year. This song is a poem of praise for God's empowering, subversive liberation. He comforts the disturbed and disturbs the comfortable, bringing people to a state of *metadecency* in which they can truly flourish and be all they were meant to be. This song is sung at the end of a long, hard journey. Its author had traveled away from all that was familiar and comforting. Ostracized by the community, she was at the end of her rope, but found herself in an alternative community where she could share and grow as one of God's people and a part of his plan. Christian community can be a network of support and encouragement. Of course, no church is without its problems, judgments, and other negative aspects that are to be found in the outside world, but its members are united by their common faith, common stories, and common work together to play a part in the establishment of God's Kingdom. These women in the church today are the daughters of Mary. The community they began continues today in these struggling women.

What then does all this talk of story and community say about God? Primarily, it says that "God affirms." He is aware of desperate situations. While the church may pride itself on being the champion of "decency" or "family values", its roots are far more scandalous. The church itself formed

when those on the margins, like Mary and Elizabeth, were brought together by their common experience with God to build up and empower one another. Just because these women do not fit the image of “decent” does not make them outsiders in God’s eyes. On the contrary, it makes them the perfect people for doing the work of the Kingdom. <



Reclamation

By Lisa Farrall

Reading a bit of theology recently has given me food for thought about my own spirituality. Some brilliant theologians emerged in the 1880's and some very helpful material was written in the 1930's and 40's. Despite having spent five years doing a degree in Theology in a fundamentalist institution and being a member of the congregation there for about a decade, I'd never heard any of the real substance of liberation theology or any modern tools for analyzing traditions.

Oddly enough, since leaving that organization, I've stumbled over a lot of the same ideas in my own spiritual journey. A bit like reinventing the spiritual wheel. At least I know that I've learnt it myself, though. And having studied it properly now, as opposed to hearing about what a threat it is in the absence of real evaluation, I feel much more centered in my own understanding and faith.

The intensive unit in 1st to 4th century Greco-Roman history was absolutely critical. There was so much valuable information in it; this material will be producing insight for years to come. Some of the most important initially, though, is just how far off the track fundamentalist theology has gone. The amount of militaristic tradition that has been imported into Protestant tradition is stunning. A simple read of European history shows where the Protestant Control

Ethic got its start. A bit of Psychology and Sociology shows why it is still so powerful and harmful.

Some months ago, I found the reputation of Christianity so tarnished by this militarized Christendom that I threw my hands in the air and foreswore it entirely. Invading other countries and trying to justify it with false pretences and creating violence in the name of God is not on. If that is the Christian faith, I'm not interested.

God, it seems, will not let me throw the baby out with the bath water. It's being done in God's name, after all.

Widely available historical and theological material utterly discredits the pretexts of militarized Christendom. It is about greed, control and empire building, it is not an accurate expression of the original faith.

Marion Maddox wrote about this in her book "God under Howard". The press and politicians present a disfigured stereotype of Christendom and quote the most entrenched conservatives saying things like all of creation is inherently sinful and all humans are by nature wicked, untrustworthy and evil. People justify invading and bombing other countries "in God's name". Keeping the two-thirds world in poverty is apparently supported, well, they keep voting in the people who do it, by Christendom.

Notice I'm using the Imperial title for the militarized dogma? Christian faith really has squat to do with empire building.

So who are they to hijack my faith and pretend God's into global conquest and economic fundamentalism? Bugger off!

A bit of study into Buddhist and Krishna (Hindu) practices, along with those of Sufi and Cabalist tradition, gives a better picture of what sort of spiritual tools the early Christians had available. Modern Psychology has been playing catch up for years, trying to rediscover what people knew about Humanity and the life of the human heart and soul.

Suffice it to say that when St. Paul wrote about "die to yourself" he probably didn't mean "be a doormat". Nor did he endorse preserving the status quo at the expense of everyone who isn't in the wealthy and powerful minority. More like discover your own self, respect it, prune off the unhelpful stuff you've inherited from family, society and painful experiences and start to live like you're bringing into life the kingdom of heaven. He wrote about having self-control, not manipulating and exploiting others.

Coming to this realization also implies realizing that a great deal of prayer is now needed for those still caught in the might-is-right paranoia of the right-wing conservatives.

The sort of guilt tripping and emotional manipulation with which they are indoctrinated is absolutely barbaric. Trust me, I've been there. To escape it often involves a nervous breakdown or something like it. Read Parker J. Palmer or Philip Yancey for their insight into that journey. It is an enormous task to start to recognize and question things you've been taught from childhood, that have been enforced with threats of terrible, horrible punishments and brutality. If you have a listen to some of the things said by conservatives to "unbelievers" and the attitudes they display, this will give you an idea of what they live with. It's horrible. And they're indoctrinated that it's their lot in life and the right place for humans to live. They've made freedom and heaven into something that happens only in the afterlife, and life on earth so negative in its focus that it's virtually a reflection of hell.

I really feel for those stuck in that worldview. It's terrible what they say and do, but they do it because they're coerced into it by screaming people in expensive suits and centuries of witch-burning. Not to mention the violence that goes on for many of them. Part of the militaristic aspect is the gender roles. It is even said sometimes that sensitive children should be given hidings to toughen them up. There is no such thing as rape in marriage because a woman's body is her husband's property. Women are bashed in relationships because they don't submit... Stuff like

that. Of course the poor buggers are screwed up. It's the same psychopathology as in families of addicts.

My response to it is in line with my understanding of liberation theology. I pray for them to be healed and freed from this bondage. I'll do so in a manner reflecting my understanding of Eastern wisdom tradition. I can't "save" them. They are human beings with their own lives to live and their own will. What I can do is wish good for them, in the interests of everybody living on the planet and everybody to come.

So this is my reclamation of my "Australian Unorthodox" faith. I'm a Christian devotee. Does this mean I'm morally superior to others? Fuck no. Does it mean I wish for and pray for freedom, peace and joy for every person on the planet, in Jesus' name? Yes! All of creation groans for renewal. The word devotee suits perfectly, with its emphasis on learning and humility.

Heh, I was writing a penance for consumerism the other day, and noticed the surprising similarities between "middle-path" traditions, old and new, East and West, and good health recommendations by doctors and shrinks. But devotions like that are something you do yourself, not something to be forced or enforced. And the devotions themselves are never the point of the exercise anyway. The point is to grow

spiritually and to help others. If you're not doing it from your own free will, it's pointless.

Otherwise all of morality is just about me. It's really odd how that negative emphasis and constant demonstration of doing what's morally right goes hand in glove with consumerism. Constantly doing things to justify yourself and ensure your own salvation somehow translates into the same type of self focus that consumerism exploits.

Genuine spirituality doesn't ever seem to be like that. Nor does it lack wisdom to the point of emasculating people intellectually or emotionally.

Part of the antidote for militarized Christendom will be to recognize that is isn't the genuine article, and to make available education and support for those who emerge from it. Because of the nature of my experience, and the buttons being pushed, it's taken me three years of intense grieving (and counting) to get this far, to this basic starting point! There will be many who have lived through far worse than I have and for longer and they'll be even angrier than me.

They need to know that not everything that's said in God's name is genuinely God's will. They need to know that God is really a loving entity and not a raging bastard. They need time and space to recognize the layers of tradition they've inherited and to search for what is real. They need support to rediscover a

reason, once they've come to realize how negative and destructive that worldview is.

It's a good thing Yahweh is a God of miracles. <



The Aims and Means of the Catholic Worker

Reprinted from The Catholic Worker newspaper, May 2002.

The aim of the Catholic Worker movement is to live in accordance with the justice and charity of Jesus Christ. Our sources are the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures as handed down in the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, with our inspiration coming from the lives of the saints, "men and women outstanding in holiness, living witnesses to Your unchanging love." (Eucharistic Prayer)

This aim requires us to begin living in a different way. We recall the words of our founders, Dorothy Day who said, "God meant things to be much easier than we have made them," and Peter Maurin who wanted to build a society "where it is easier for people to be good."

* * *

When we examine our society, which is generally called capitalist (because of its methods of producing and controlling wealth) and is bourgeois (because of prevailing concern for acquisition and material interests, and its emphasis on respectability and mediocrity), we find it far from God's justice.

--In economics, private and state capitalism bring about an unjust distribution of wealth, for the profit

motive guides decisions. Those in power live off the sweat of others' brows, while those without power are robbed of a just return for their work. Usury (the charging of interest above administrative costs) is a major contributor to the wrongdoing intrinsic to this system. We note, especially, how the world debt crisis leads poor countries into greater deprivation and a dependency from which there is no foreseeable escape. Here at home, the number of hungry and homeless and unemployed people rises in the midst of increasing affluence.

--In labor, human need is no longer the reason for human work. Instead, the unbridled expansion of technology, necessary to capitalism and viewed as "progress," holds sway. Jobs are concentrated in productivity and administration for a "high-tech," war-related, consumer society of disposable goods, so that laborers are trapped in work that does not contribute to human welfare. Furthermore, as jobs become more specialized, many people are excluded from meaningful work or are alienated from the products of their labor. Even in farming, agribusiness has replaced agriculture, and, in all areas, moral restraints are run over roughshod, and a disregard for the laws of nature now threatens the very planet.

--In politics, the state functions to control and regulate life. Its power has burgeoned hand in hand with growth in technology, so that military, scientific and corporate interests get the highest priority when

concrete political policies are formulated. Because of the sheer size of institutions, we tend towards government by bureaucracy--that is, government by nobody. Bureaucracy, in all areas of life, is not only impersonal, but also makes accountability and, therefore, an effective political forum for redressing grievances, next to impossible.

--In morals, relations between people are corrupted by distorted images of the human person. Class, race and sex often determine personal worth and position within society, leading to structures that foster oppression. Capitalism further divides society by pitting owners against workers in perpetual conflict over wealth and its control. Those who do not "produce" are abandoned, and left, at best, to be "processed" through institutions. Spiritual destitution is rampant, manifested in isolation, madness, promiscuity and violence.

--The arms race stands as a clear sign of the direction and spirit of our age. It has extended the domain of destruction and the fear of annihilation, and denies the basic right to life. There is a direct connection between the arms race and destitution. "The arms race is an utterly treacherous trap, and one which injures the poor to an intolerable degree." (Vatican II)

* * *

In contrast to what we see around us, as well as within ourselves, stands St. Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of the

Common Good, a vision of a society where the good of each member is bound to the good of the whole in the service of God.

To this end, we advocate:

--*Personalism*, a philosophy which regards the freedom and dignity of each person as the basis, focus and goal of all metaphysics and morals. In following such wisdom, we move away from a self-centered individualism toward the good of the other. This is to be done by taking personal responsibility for changing conditions, rather than looking to the state or other institutions to provide impersonal "charity." We pray for a Church renewed by this philosophy and for a time when all those who feel excluded from participation are welcomed with love, drawn by the gentle personalism Peter Maurin taught.

--*A decentralized society*, in contrast to the present bigness of government, industry, education, health care and agriculture. We encourage efforts such as family farms, rural and urban land trusts, worker ownership and management of small factories, homesteading projects, food, housing and other cooperatives--any effort in which money can once more become merely a medium of exchange, and human beings are no longer commodities.

--*A "green revolution,"* so that it is possible to rediscover the proper meaning of our labor and/or true

bonds with the land; a distributist communitarianism, self-sufficient through farming, crafting and appropriate technology; a radically new society where people will rely on the fruits of their own toil and labor; associations of mutuality, and a sense of fairness to resolve conflicts.

* * *

We believe this needed personal and social transformation should be pursued by the means Jesus revealed in His sacrificial love. With Christ as our Exemplar, by prayer and communion with His Body and Blood, we strive for practices of

--*Nonviolence*. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." (Matt. 5:9) Only through nonviolent action can a personalist revolution come about, one in which one evil will not be replaced simply by another. Thus, we oppose the deliberate taking of human life for any reason, and see every oppression as blasphemy. Jesus taught us to take suffering upon ourselves rather than inflict it upon others, and He calls us to fight against violence with the spiritual weapons of prayer, fasting and non-cooperation with evil. Refusal to pay taxes for war, to register for conscription, to comply with any unjust legislation; participation in nonviolent strikes and boycotts, protests or vigils; withdrawal of support for dominant systems, corporate funding or usurious practices are all excellent means to establish peace.

--*The works of mercy* (as found in Matt. 25:31-46) are at the heart of the Gospel and they are clear mandates for our response to "the least of our brothers and sisters." Houses of hospitality are centers for learning to do the acts of love, so that the poor can receive what is, in justice, theirs, the second coat in our closet, the spare room in our home, a place at our table. Anything beyond what we immediately need belongs to those who go without.

--*Manual labor*, in a society that rejects it as undignified and inferior. "Besides inducing cooperation, besides overcoming barriers and establishing the spirit of sister and brotherhood (besides just getting things done), manual labor enables us to use our bodies as well as our hands, our minds." (Dorothy Day) The Benedictine motto *Ora et Labora* reminds us that the work of human hands is a gift for the edification of the world and the glory of God.

--*Voluntary poverty*. "The mystery of poverty is that by sharing in it, making ourselves poor in giving to others, we increase our knowledge and belief in love." (Dorothy Day) By embracing voluntary poverty, that is, by casting our lot freely with those whose impoverishment is not a choice, we would ask for the grace to abandon ourselves to the love of God. It would put us on the path to incarnate the Church's "preferential option for the poor."

* * *

We must be prepared to accept seeming failure with these aims, for sacrifice and suffering are part of the Christian life. Success, as the world determines it, is not the final criterion for judgments. The most important thing is the love of Jesus Christ and how to live His truth. <



The Magnificat of The Virgin Mary

The Gospel according to Luke (1:46-55)

Scripture text: Revised Standard Version - Catholic Edition

My soul magnifies the Lord,
And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.
For He has regarded the low estate of His
handmaiden,
For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me
blessed.
For He who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who
fear Him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with His arm:
He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their
hearts.
He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree.
He has filled the hungry with good things;
and the rich He has sent empty away.
He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of
His mercy;
As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to His
posterity forever.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

*As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be,
world without end.*

Amen <

Peak Oil Happened on 12/16/2005

By Kenneth Deffeyes

Join us as we watch the crisis unfolding

February 11, 2006

In the January 2004 Current Events on this web site, I predicted that world oil production would peak on Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 2005. In hindsight, that prediction was in error by three weeks. An update using the 2005 data shows that we passed the peak on December 16, 2005.

“A decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires” that I present an update on the data sources and the interpretation.

The underlying methodology is Hubbert’s postulate that the rate of new oil discoveries depends on the fraction of the oil that has not yet been discovered. Similarly, the rate of oil production depends on the fraction of oil that has not yet been produced. A test of Hubbert’s hypothesis, using the long history of US oil production, is on pages 35—42 of my book *Beyond Oil*. An algebraic result from the Hubbert theory says that the production rate peaks when half of the oil has been produced.

The most accurate measure of the eventual total oil comes from the “hits” graph on page 48 of *Beyond*

Oil. The input data for that graph are the dates of the first well in each oilfield. The February 2006 edition of Colin Campbell’s ASPO newsletter contains his updated version of the Exxon Mobil discovery dates. I enlarged Campbell’s graph and scaled off data for 2004 and 2005. An update of the calculation reported on page 49 of *Beyond Oil* gives an unchanged estimate: 2.013 trillion barrels. (There is always a statistical nervousness when an estimate does not change. I make the estimates by stepwise trials, and the winning step was 2.013. What I know is that neither estimate was 2.012 or 2.014.)

The world peak would then happen when 1.0065 trillion barrels have been produced (half of 2.013). Following Hubbert, I used the Oil & Gas Journal end-of-year production numbers. It isn’t that the Oil & Gas Journal reports are divinely inspired; their methodology is well explained and their reports constitute a relatively consistent data set. The cumulative world production at the end of 2004 was 0.9812 trillion barrels and at the end of 2005 it was 1.00748 trillion. During the year, we passed the halfway point. The graph shows the date of the crossover: December 16, 2005.

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There are some interesting additional bits in the end-of-year statistics. Compared to 2004, world oil production was up 0.8 percent in 2005, nowhere near enough to compensate for a demand rise of roughly 3 percent. The high prices did not bring much additional oil out of the ground. Most oil-producing countries are in decline. The rise in production was largely from Saudi Arabia, Russia, and Angola. The Saudi production for 2005 was 9.155 million barrels per day. On March 6, 2003 Saudi Aramco and the government of Saudi Arabia announced by way of the Dow Jones newswire that they were maxed out at 9.2 barrels per day. In retrospect, that statement seems to be accurate. Further details are in Matthew Simmons' book *Twilight in the Desert*.

Could some new discovery come along and reverse the global oil decline? The world oil industry is a huge system: Annual production worth 1.7 trillion dollars. I don't see anything on the horizon large enough to turn it around.

So what are the policy implications? Numerous critics are claiming that the present world economic situation is a house of cards: built on trade deficits, housing price bubbles, and barely-adequate natural gas supplies. Pulling any one card out from the bottom of the pile might collapse the whole structure.

By 2025, we're going to be back in the Stone Age.

There are calls for embargoing Iranian oil because of the nuclear weapons situation. Pulling four million barrels per day out from under the world energy supply might trigger a severe worldwide recession. In the post-peak era, we're playing a new ball game and we don't yet know the rules.

Ghawar, the super giant Saudi oilfield, is producing increasing amounts of water along with the oil. When Simmons sent *Twilight in the Desert* to the printer, the water cut at Ghawar was around 30 percent. There are later reports on the Internet (home.entouch.net/dmd/ghawar.htm) of water cuts as high as 55 percent. Ghawar has been producing 4 million barrels per day; when the Ghawar field waters out, you can kiss your lifestyle goodbye.

Since we have passed the peak without initiating major corrective measures, we now have to rely primarily on methods that we have already engineered. Long-term research and development projects, no matter how noble their objectives, have to take a back seat while we deal with the short-term problems. Long-term examples in the proposed 2007 US budget (Feb. 9, 2006 New York Times page A-18) include a 65 percent increase in the programs to produce ethanol from corn, a 25.8 percent increase for developing hydrogen fuel cell cars, and a 78.5 percent increase in spending on solar energy research. The Times reports that solar energy today supplies one percent of US electricity; the hope is to double that to

2 percent by the year 2025. By 2025, we're going to be back in the Stone Age.

Ethanol, fuel cells, and solar cells are not the only shimmering dreams. Methane hydrates, oil shale, and the Yucca Mountain radioactive waste depository would be better off forgotten. There are plenty of solid opportunities. Energy conservation is by far the most important. Initiatives that are already engineered and ready to go are biodiesel from palm oil, coal gasification (for both gaseous and liquid fuels), high-efficiency diesel automobiles, and revamping our food supply. Every little bit helps, but even if wind energy continues its success it will still be a little bit.

That's it. I can now refer to the world oil peak in the past tense. My career as a prophet is over. I'm now an historian. <



Polemic

By Lisa Farrall

Studying 7 & 8 BCE Prophets (ancient traditions) has given me a new perspective on the whole worship thing. In other places I've written about how little the singing and preaching in a brick building seems like real spiritual expression to me. Compare it with Sunday morning spent in the sun scaling a cliff, or a moonlight solo climb. The whole 'being thankful' concept is not metaphysical in those places. The Prophets, however, add another influence altogether. Social justice.

Book after book in the Hebrew Bible is filled with warnings about empty or hokey religion and concern about the neglect of the rights of poor, widows, orphans and strangers in the land. Basically, anything you do or say to stick up for the oppressed is an act of worship, if you worship the God of Jesus. Forget about the way he's been portrayed in militaristic society, that's a lie designed to support their worship of the idol Economy. The greedy, with a lust for power, use religion as another tool of deception to get away with their machinations.

Let me make this personal.

Just look at all that hokey religion. Exorcism for fun and profit. Throw a few coins to a cause and then go

home to your comfortable bed. The one you share with Mammon.

Exorcise this. Why do you raise your hands in prayer to God when they're covered with the blood of the homeless, the poor, the many nations you have plundered and destroyed?

You focus on every little detail of your own lives, every jot and tittle of law, but where is justice for those living in cardboard boxes on the streets? Start treating your fellow humans like a respected part of creation before the chickens of destruction all come home to roost.

All the steel, rubber, bricks and fibreglass that you make your idols out of. You value the economy more than people to whom God gave breath. You oppress and repress and destroy, you've turned God's name into your excuse for your vain egos, your militarism and economically-fuelled destruction of the earth and many of the nations on it. Stealing from the poor and with-holding education that might allow them self-determination is just the start of your abuse.

Do you think that when you put on your prayer-performances and hokey religious displays that God's focusing all his attention solely on you? What about the blood of the millions you've slaughtered and bombed and burned in the cause of your Economy? Do you think God is blind to all that? What about the

souls of the millions who don't call out to God because you, with all your greed and lust for power, you've made God of the Angel Armies look like the spiteful oppressor who would condone you pouring white phosphorous on the bare skin of women and children.

Do you really think God hears your prayers while you do this to his reputation? When God sent his son to earth, he didn't live in a palace or hang out with greedy politicians and corporate leaders. He gave his time and even his life for those you let live in boxes on the streets. Those you say deserve to suffer because of their sins. The poor nations, the ill, single mothers, prostitutes and queers, he gave his life to save. While you're in prayer their blood is crying out against you.

Do you think he wants his life's work seen as propping up your economy at the expense of their lives? How do you sleep?

You've allowed your own traditions to twist God's law into a prop for your militarism and narrow minded morality. Then you use that to excuse your shocking treatment of others. Love is the law, not might is right. Get off your high horses and take a good long look at this garbage tip you've made. It was an accident of circumstance that has you high in a sky scraper or in Parliament or a comfortable home in suburbia and not in some barrio or smokey mountain.

Remember the poor, the widows, the orphans and the strangers in the land and remember that the God who's name you profane, God of the Angel Armies, is on their side. <



Archdiocese Intends to Close Haven for Katrina Survivors: Protest in Progress Please Take Action - Now!

The Archdiocese of New Orleans has announced its intention to close the Parish of St. Augustine Catholic Church in New Orleans, Louisiana, the oldest African-American Catholic parish in the United States. The decision was effective March 15, 2006, but implementation has been delayed.

Activists barricaded themselves in the empty rectory early Monday March 20, 2006, and say they will not leave until the Archdiocese promises to reopen the church.

St. Augustine's was one of the few churches to escape destruction during Hurricane Katrina and the flooding caused by the breaking of the levees. Since the storm, it has been the central provider of services to the historic Treme community. Its fellowship hall operates as the sole community pantry where survivors can get donations of food and clothing.

In addition, St. Augustine's is one of the few institutions to open its doors to those working to rebuild New Orleans. Its sanctuary has been opened to hundreds of young people as a place to sleep while volunteering throughout the city.

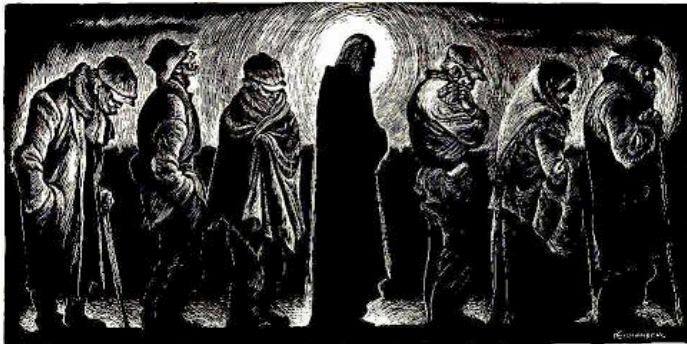
Just last week, young people participating with Katrina On the Ground as part of an FOR-sponsored Alternative Spring Break stayed at the church while volunteering.

St. Augustine parishioners are asking people to take the following action steps to support the struggle to keep their parish open:

Send letters to:

Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes
The Archdiocese of New Orleans
7887 Walmsley Ave.,
New Orleans, LA 70125

Thank You. <



Christ of the Breadlines by Ade Bethune

Helping the Poor, the Immigrant, and the Injured May Be Considered Treason

(According to House Bill H. R. 4437)

By Mark and Louise Zwick

We had just returned from visiting our sick men's houses, where many of our guests live who are greatly disabled and rejected by our society, to read in the Houston Chronicle 12/17/05 that the House of Representatives (not the Senate) had passed a bill that would declare all of these men common criminals and subject to a year in prison because they were undocumented. They would become felons-if this bill becomes law.

The many paralyzed-quadriplegics--who have fallen from scaffolds while working on buildings in Houston could now be easily imprisoned and then deported.

In this new legislation there is a tremendous expansion of what constitutes smuggling and harboring-giving a cigarette or a sandwich or a glass of water to an immigrant may be reason enough to make one a felon.

In one grand sweep, our representatives solved the immigration problem by creating as suspects any Spanish-speaking person who lives and works in the United States, not to mention those who look Hispanic.

The Brownsville Herald stated, "If the promoters of this legislation get their way, the immigrant workers who build homes, clean hotel rooms, work in landscaping, and toil in manufacturing jobs will be lumped with some of the worst criminals in this country."

Many new industries will have to be developed to care for the offenders. Just imagine how many prison hospitals would have to be built just to care for the sick and injured immigrants who have already been rejected and left to suffer or die on their own. They number in the thousands.

Wouldn't that be an irony? Once they are declared criminals, society will be required to serve them in prisons after years of deliberate neglect.

More prisons would have to be constructed for all the carpenters and cement workers who have built all these condominiums and town houses that now engulf us in Houston. The builders, you can be sure, would arrange for the avoidance of arrest until the buildings were complete, because everyone knows who builds the buildings in Houston.

Some, of course, would think this was wonderful- those who place buildings and running prisons as a great part of the Gross Domestic Product. The prisons could not be built fast enough, of course, to house the

millions of "criminals" who today are our best workers.

New offices would have to be set up throughout the United States to receive sightings of "aliens!" Teachers could report undocumented immigrants as they reported anyone who disagreed in Communist countries. Emergency room doctors could report the very sickest to be taken to prison.

The courts would be so clogged with good people now called criminals that robbers and murderers would not be able to be brought to trial.

Those who designed this legislation have saved the best consequences for last as part of their plot. They believe that mandatory prison sentences of up to five years should be imposed on church groups and employers and workers in social services agencies who assist immigrants with their most basic needs.

Mixed with the immigrant felons would be white collar workers who stayed true to their calling.

As a Representative from Texas who opposed the bill said in the House of Representatives, "If on some silent night, when all is calm and all is bright a young man and a clearly pregnant woman, from out of town, ask if they can rest by your manger - be warned! First verify their visas." <

John Dear is a Jesuit priest, peace activist, and the author/editor of 20 books on peace and nonviolence, including most recently “The Questions of Jesus” and “Living Peace,” both published by Doubleday, and “You Will Be My Witnesses” (available next month from Orbis Books). He lives in New Mexico. For further information, see: www.johndear.org his article is reprinted from the Jonah House website and appears here without permission from the author.

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Karl Germyn, presently lives in Vernon with his cat, Tom. An avid writer, he maintains a web log at <http://www.livejournal.com/users/rhykan/>, and plays Dungeons & Dragons regularly and is involved in the editing and online promotion of the Christian Radical.

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Chris Rooney is a writer, musician and activist who lives in Vancouver Canada. He is involved in the Catholic Worker movement and the War Resisters Support Campaign. He is also one of the editors of this zine, he can be reached at the.christian.radical.zine@gmail.com and has a blog he never updates at www.livejournal.com/users/broken_anthem/

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Lisa Farrall is from Australia. A 39 single mother of two, prophet, rock climber, ex-biker, ex-druggie, ex-Pentecostal fundamentalist with Post Traumatic Stress. :-)
In her spare time she paint things, writes and try to work out how to follow Jesus in a country where his words have been twisted to support the kind of religious abuse he opposed. She believes the gospel is supposed to be *good* news to liberate people, not justification for further exploitation.
Writing is a way for her to voice how she thinks God feels about things

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Joy Ellison lives in Vancouver, Washington, USA. She has recently returned from spending two months in Palestine, working with International Women's Peace Service, and Christian Peacemaker Teams, two organizations, which support Palestinian nonviolent resistance. She is looking forward to working in Palestine next summer and annually for the next few years. At home Joy trains people in nonviolence and lectures about the Israeli occupation of Palestine. You can learn more about her training workshops at www.treebythewater.org and her work in Palestine at www.livejournal.com/users/in_palestine. If you want to financially support her work please feel free to drop her a line.

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“Archdiocese Intends to Close Haven for Katrina Survivors: Protest in Progress”
Was reprinted from the Fellowship Of Reconciliation e-mail list. For more information on FOR and other ways to take action on this issue please visit <http://www.forusa.org/media/survivorshaven032106.html>

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Melissa Sillitoe recently relocated to Portland from her hometown, Salt Lake City, in search of stormier skies. She is a member of St. Philip Neri Parish's Peace and Justice Commission and the Metropolitan Alliance for Common Good. She has recently published poems in SINE CERA, NETWORK, and THE WEST VIEW. Her poetry is influenced by her belief in a light that outshines darkness and that all we need to bring about God's kingdom on earth is right here.

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Michael Friesen is taking time off from religious studies to travel throughout Europe. He is currently living in Ireland and will be living with the l'Arche community in Cork from February 2006 to February 2007. He has a blog at <http://anarchocatholic.blogspot.com/>

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Adam Christian Robertson lives in the Sierre-Nevada mountains in California. He is going to school for digital art and graphic design and contributed the image on the cover.

You can reach him at: ghettocottage@gmail.com

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Kenneth Deffeyes of Princeton was a colleague of M. King Hubbert. Using Hubbert's formula that predicted Peak Oil in the U.S., Deffeyes says the world has now Peaked. His article on the global peak in oil production is reprinted from GNN.com

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Helping the Poor, the Immigrant, the Injured May Be Considered Treason was reprinted from the paper of the Houston Catholic Worker, Vol. XXVI, No. 1, January-February 2006 and appears here without permission.

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The Revd. Sr. Sarah-Andrea A. Morrigan, S.A.S., is the Rector of St. Brigid Celtic Anabaptist Community of Central Portland, her article is protected by creative commons license and appears here with permission

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“The Aims and Means of the Catholic Worker” is reprinted from www.catholicworker.com

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The pictures of the Palm Sunday celebrations are taken from www.holylandtrust.org, all other images except the cover are taken from image searches of www.google.com except for the cover art, which is courtesy of Adam Robertson.



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The editors, the Christian Radical



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